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Annual report on evaluation

Report of the Director, Evaluation Office

Summary

In accordance with the revised evaluation policy of UNFPA (DP/FPA/2013/5) and relevant Executive Board decisions, the independent Evaluation Office submits its annual report for 2014. The report presents progress made by the evaluation function, specifically in relation to the transitional biennial budgeted evaluation plan 2014-2015 against key performance indicators. It highlights progress in strengthening internal evaluation capacity, and outlines UNFPA engagement to contribute to strengthening national evaluation capacities.

The report presents the lessons learned from corporate evaluations finalized in 2014. It also sets out how the Evaluation Office contributes to joint evaluation efforts within the United Nations and global communities of practice. The report highlights the main challenges and prospects for evaluation at UNFPA and presents a number of recommendations.

Elements of a decision

The Executive Board may wish to:

(a) *Take note* of the present report on the evaluation function at UNFPA (DP/FPA/2015/6) and of the Evaluation Office workplan for 2015 (annex I), including amendments to the transitional biennial budgeted evaluation plan, 2014-2015;

(b) *Reaffirm* the central role played by the evaluation function in UNFPA, the relevance of the principles set out in the revised evaluation policy (DP/FPA/2013/5) and the importance of their implementation within the organization;

(c) *Take note* of the challenges in the field of evaluation and of the related recommendations presented in the report, and *encourage* UNFPA to take action for further strengthening the evaluation function at UNFPA

(d) *Request* UNFPA to report in 2016 on progress in addressing key issues and challenges in evaluation in the annual report on evaluation to the Executive Board.

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* Annexes are available on the UNFPA Executive Board website.

I Introduction

1. This report provides an assessment of the performance of the evaluation function against the transitional budgeted biennial evaluation plan 2014-2015. It highlights progress and challenges in the evolution of the evaluation function since the revised evaluation policy (DP/FPA/2013/5) was adopted in June 2013. The report provides detailed information on: performance against key indicators; outlines steps taken to strengthen evaluation capacity; and sets out how UNFPA engages within the United Nations and global evaluation community. The report presents lessons learned from three corporate evaluations completed in 2014 and provides an update on progress against the 2014-2015 evaluation plan, including adjustments made to reflect changing national contexts (programme-level evaluations) and to meet organizational requirements (corporate evaluations).

2. The continued strengthening of the evaluation function at UNFPA was a priority in 2014, and the newly established independent Evaluation Office has worked together with regional and country offices to translate the revised evaluation policy into practice. Significant effort has been made to improve evaluation planning and management, increase the quality of evaluations, and enhance the capacity of monitoring and evaluation staff. At the same time, the Evaluation Office has increased its production of corporate evaluations and studies. This progress by UNFPA towards a more mature and effective evaluation function has been acknowledged in two recent independent reviews conducted by the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network[1] and the Joint Inspection Unit.[2]

II. Performance of the evaluation function

3. The UNFPA evaluation function is assessed against six key dimensions of performance: (a) planning and management; (b) quality; (c) dissemination of results; (d) use and follow-up; (e) human resources; and (f) financial resources. These are aligned with the revised evaluation policy and provide evidence of progress in those areas critical for the production of timely, good-quality evaluations, which can be used with confidence to meet needs for accountability, evidence-based decision-making and lesson learning. Wherever possible, previous data is presented to facilitate analysis of trends. Where this is not possible, 2014 data will represent a baseline for future reporting.

A. Transitional biennial budgeted evaluation plan 2014-2015: planning and management of corporate and programme-level evaluations

Corporate evaluations

4. In 2014, the Evaluation Office completed an independent evaluation of the Lebanon country programme, 2010-2014; an independent evaluation of the Turkey country programme, 2011-2015; and a joint evaluation of joint gender programmes on gender equality in the United Nations system.

5. The Evaluation Office launched, in 2014, three thematic evaluations to assess UNFPA support to (a) family planning (2008-2013); (b) adolescent and youth (2008-2014); and (c) population and housing census data to inform decision-making and policy formulation (2005-

[1] Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN), *United Nations Population Fund*, Synthesis report, 2014.

[2] Joint Inspection Unit, *Analysis of the evaluation function in the United System* (JIU/REP/2014/6).

2014). A synthesis study of lessons learned from country programme evaluations during the period 2010-2013 was also commissioned.[3]

6. The evaluation of UNFPA support to family planning will assess how the framework set out in the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2008-2013, the reproductive rights and sexual and reproductive health framework (2008-2011), the Global Programme to Enhance Reproductive Health Commodity Security (Phase I: 2007-2012) and the HIV/Unintended Pregnancies framework (2011-2015), has guided the programming and implementation of UNFPA interventions in family planning. This evaluation places particular emphasis on learning, with a view to informing the implementation of the UNFPA family planning strategy *Choices not Chance* 2012-2020, and other related interventions and programmes, including the Global Programme to Enhance Reproductive Health Commodity Security (Phase II: 2013-2020).

7. The evaluation of UNFPA support to adolescents and youth will assess how the frameworks set out in recent UNFPA strategic plans (2008-2013; 2014-2017), the UNFPA Framework for Action on Adolescents and Youth (2007) and the UNFPA Strategy on Adolescents and Youth (2012) have guided the programming and implementation of UNFPA interventions regarding adolescents and youth. The evaluation is envisaged as a learning opportunity to contribute to the current UNFPA Strategy on Adolescents and Youth (2012-2020) and towards acceleration of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development.

8. The evaluation of UNFPA support to population and housing censuses data will assess the extent to which UNFPA has strengthened national capacity for the production, dissemination and use of high-quality disaggregated data, and for the integration of evidence-based analysis into decision-making and policy formulation. It will account to partner countries, donors and other key stakeholders on UNFPA support to the 2010 round of population and housing censuses. The evaluation will also inform the programming and implementation of interventions under the Strategic Plan, 2014-2017, including key strategic orientations, gaps and opportunities for UNFPA support to population and housing census, and the post-2015 development agenda on data for development.

9. In 2014, the Evaluation Office completed the inception phase for each evaluation; inception reports are published on the UNFPA website.[4] In 2015, the main data collection and analysis phase commenced; this includes: in-depth desk reviews, covering 19 UNFPA programme countries; country case studies based on field visits, covering 17 programme countries; two regional case studies;[5] stakeholder interviews; and a variety of surveys of a wider range of UNFPA country offices and external stakeholders.

10. All three evaluations will be finalized between December 2015 and April 2016, thereby completing the Evaluation Office reporting on outcomes of the Strategic Plan 2008-2013[6] and informing the midterm review of the Strategic Plan, 2014-2017.

11. The Evaluation Office has commissioned a synthesis study to capture lessons learned from country programme evaluations commissioned by UNFPA between 2010 and 2013. The synthesis report will be finalized in May 2015.[7]

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[3] See Annex I.

[4] http://www.unfpa.org/evaluation

[5] See Annex III.

[6] Thematic evaluation of UNFPA support to maternal health (2000-2011); joint evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: Accelerating Change (2008-2012); and joint evaluation of joint programmes on gender equality in the United Nations system.

[7] See Annex I.

12. In the latter half of 2015, the Evaluation Office will commence the independent evaluation of the country programme for Bangladesh (2012-2016). This will complete the work of the Evaluation Office with regard to the planned cycle of six independent country programme evaluations, each covering a different UNFPA region, to support the development and rollout of methodology to strengthen the conduct of country programme evaluations: Bolivia (2012), Cameroon (2012), Madagascar (2013), Lebanon (2014) and Turkey (2014).

13. In 2015, the Evaluation Office will commence the preparatory phase for the midterm evaluation of the Global Programme to Enhance Reproductive Health Commodity Security (Phase II: 2013-2020); and the end-line evaluation of the H4+ partnership joint support to improve women's and children's health, covering 2011-2016.[8]

Programme-level evaluations

14. The transitional budgeted biennial evaluation plan 2014-2015 sets out commitments for the conduct of country programme evaluations commissioned and managed by UNFPA country offices, with guidance and support from regional offices and the Evaluation Office.

15. In 2014, 16 country programme evaluations were commissioned; eight of these have been completed and eight are at the draft final report stage.[9] The results from these evaluations have been used to inform the design of new country programmes, which will be presented to the Executive Board for approval in 2015. Four planned evaluations were postponed because the country programme had been extended (Brazil, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Somalia and Yemen). One planned evaluation in Maldives did not go ahead, in order for the country office to participate in an evaluation of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework. A programme-level evaluation of the Gender-based Violence Information Management System was managed by the UNFPA Humanitarian Branch in 2014; the Evaluation Office provided technical support as a member of the multi-agency Advisory Group.

16. It is anticipated that 20 country programme evaluations will be conducted in 2015, compared to 15 evaluations foreseen in the transitional budgeted biennial evaluation plan 2014-2015[10] (including those evaluations postponed from 2014). In addition, a regional evaluation of UNFPA support to family planning will be conducted in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

17. The revised evaluation policy envisages country programme evaluations conducted at least once in two programme cycles, rather than the previous practice of once in every programme cycle.[11] It is expected that this will lead to reduced geographical coverage over time. In 2014, over 90 per cent of country offices starting a new programming cycle in 2015 conducted an evaluation of their previous country programme.[12] It will be important to monitor the impact of the new approach, including reflection on evolving evaluation needs related to changing modalities at country level, including "Delivering as one", joint programming and increasing humanitarian operations. Also, it will be important to respond appropriately to the growing demand from donors for evaluation of non-core funding to UNFPA at country, regional and global levels.

18. In principle, these changes should lead to a diversified range of evaluations conducted at country and regional levels and by other business units;, this, in turn, will increase the supply of evaluative evidence to better inform decision-making, strengthen accountability and transparency, and contribute to organizational accountability and learning. There is evidence that some country

[8] For further details on these evaluations, see Annex I.

[9] Annex II provides a detailed overview of the progress in implementing country programme evaluations planned for 2014-2015.

[10] DP/FPA/2014/2.

[11] DP/FPA/2013/5, paragraph 13(a).

[12] See Annexes II and III.

offices are planning and budgeting for diverse types of evaluations, as reflected in recent costed evaluation plans presented to the Executive Board. However, at present, there is a lack of clarity regarding programme evaluation, as existing guidance is patchy and outdated. Comprehensive guidance is required to inform evaluation planning, management, resourcing and use. The development of the new budgeted evaluation plan provides an opportunity to clarify expectations.

B. Quality of evaluation reports

19. In 2014, UNFPA introduced additional measures, focused on the key preparatory phase of the evaluation process, to improve the quality of country programme evaluations.

20. The Evaluation Office is now responsible for the approval of the terms of reference of all country programme evaluations, and for the pre-qualification of evaluators selected by commissioning offices. Regional monitoring and evaluation advisers perform quality assurance of the terms of reference prepared by country offices before submitting them to the Evaluation Office for final approval. In 2014, the Evaluation Office approved the terms of reference of 17 programme-level evaluations and pre-qualified the evaluation teams of 12 programme-level evaluations.[13]

21. It is important to note that quality assurance for both draft final and final evaluation reports for all programme-level evaluations is undertaken by the evaluation managers in commissioning offices. In the case of country programme evaluations, quality assurance is performed with the support of regional office monitoring and evaluation advisers.

22. The Evaluation Office performs an *ex post* assessment of the quality of final programme evaluation reports, to indicate the degree of confidence that can be placed in the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation and to monitor compliance against the norms and standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG). In 2014, 16 final reports of programme-level evaluations conducted in 2010, 2012, 2013 and 2014 were submitted to the Evaluation Office for quality assessment.[14]

23. Table 1 provides a summary of quality assessment of country programme evaluation reports from 2010 to 2014, presented by year of evaluation. There has been a slow but steady improvement in quality. The proportion of reports assessed as "good" is increasing, with a corresponding decrease in the number of "poor" reports. It should be noted that no reports were assessed as "unsatisfactory" in 2013 and 2014.

[13] See Annex II.

[14] Out of these 16 evaluation reports, 15 were country programme evaluations. See Annex IV for a summary of the quality assessment of final country programme evaluation reports.

Table 1
Quality of country programme evaluation reports (2010-2014)

	Evaluation quality assessment rating								
Year	*Very Good*	*%*	*Good*	*%*	*Poor*	*%*	*Unsatisfactory*	*%*	***Total***
2010	0	0%	2	8%	16	70%	5	22%	**23**
2011	0	0%	3	12%	19	73%	4	16%	**26**
2012	0	0%	3	20%	10	67%	2	13%	**15**
2013	0	0%	5	45%	6	55%	0	0%	**11**
2014	0	0%	3	100%	0	0%	0	0%	**3**
Overall results	**0**	**0%**	**16**	**21%**	**51**	**65%**	**11**	**14%**	**78**
Quality trend	↔		↑↑		↓↓		↓↓		

Source: UNFPA Evaluation Office

24. It is still too early to conclude that the various measures UNFPA has put in place to strengthen capacity and to improve planning, resourcing and quality assurance of programme evaluations are leading to improved quality. However, the three country programme evaluations so far assessed for 2014 are all rated "good" and it should be noted that two of these (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan) were conducted following the introduction of quality assurance of terms of reference and pre-qualification of the evaluation team. A clearer picture will emerge once all 16 country programme evaluations conducted in 2014 have been assessed.

25. An important dimension of evaluation quality relates to how well UNFPA meets requirements in terms of gender-related UNEG norms and standards for evaluation. In 2014, the Evaluation Office reported that the UNFPA evaluation function met requirements regarding corporate and programme evaluations as measured by the United Nations system-wide action plan for implementation of the policy on gender equality and the empowerment of women. To further strengthen reporting, the Evaluation Office will integrate, in 2015, the United Nations System-wide Action Plan evaluation indicator reporting tools into existing quality assurance mechanisms.

26. In 2015, UNFPA will extend the evaluation quality assurance mechanism to all programme level evaluations. The Evaluation Office will put in place a systematic, independent quality assurance mechanism for corporate evaluations to strengthen current practice.

27. However, it is recognised that a number of systemic challenges persist. In particular, as is the case for most bilateral and multilateral commissioners of evaluations, UNFPA is faced with the issue of the limited availability and capacity of skilled evaluation specialists. This is particularly challenging in light of the highly specialized mandate of UNFPA, and points to a need to strengthen procurement practice for both programme and corporate evaluations.

C. Dissemination of evaluation results

28. Effective dissemination and communication of evaluation results is critical to ensure transparency and accountability to stakeholders and to promote effective learning and use. All UNFPA programme and corporate evaluations, together with their management response, are available in the UNFPA Evaluation Database.[15]

[15] http://web2.unfpa.org/public/about/oversight/evaluations/

29. In 2014, the Evaluation Office worked to improve communication mechanisms to better inform UNFPA staff, key partners and stakeholders on the results of corporate and programme evaluations as well as other evaluation activities at UNFPA. The Evaluation Office provides quarterly updates to the UNFPA Executive Committee, with a view to feeding evaluation results into corporate decision-making. Regular reports on evaluation results and learning are also provided at the request of the Audit Advisory Committee. The UNFPA evaluation website has been redesigned, and the first issue of *Impact,* a biannual newsletter on UNFPA evaluation was published in November 2014.[16]

30. In order to enhance the use of evaluation results, all corporate evaluations include a dissemination plan aimed at ensuring the timeliness and accessibility of evaluation products at all stages of the evaluation process.[17] Evaluation products are made available in different languages (English, French, Spanish and, for some evaluations, Arabic and Portuguese) to facilitate access by a wide range of key stakeholders and development partners.

31. In 2014, the Evaluation Office promoted pro-active dissemination of evaluation results through the organization of stakeholder workshops, webinars, conferences and informal briefings to the Executive Board. For the evaluation of the third country programme of cooperation between UNFPA and Lebanon, a web conference was conducted in November 2014 to discuss the results, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation, as well as the management response. For the evaluation of the fifth country programme of cooperation between UNFPA and Turkey, a stakeholder workshop was held, at the draft final report stage, in Ankara in November 2014. The workshop was well attended by participants from the Turkish Government, implementing partners, and civil society organizations. Discussions validated the findings and conclusions of the evaluation and helped to refine recommendations for the final report.

32. The dissemination process for joint evaluations is closely co-ordinated with evaluation partners. Dissemination activities took place in 2014 for the joint evaluations of the UNFPA-UNICEF joint programme on female genital mutilation and for the joint gender programmes on gender equality in the United Nations system. The lead evaluation managers (UNFPA for female genital mutilation; UN-Women for joint gender programmes) presented the findings and the joint management responses at their respective Executive Board annual sessions. In both cases, joint informal sessions and webinars were also organized.

D. Evaluation use and follow-up

33. In June 2014, the Executive Board requested UNFPA to ensure that there is systematic use and follow-up to evaluations; specifically, management responses should address evaluation findings and recommendations in a timely manner, with a view to improving programme performance, effectiveness and efficiency.

34. The Programme Division at UNFPA is responsible for the promotion of evaluation use and follow-up of management responses to corporate and programme-level evaluations. In 2011, UNFPA established an online Management Response Tracking System to monitor progress in the implementation of management responses for country programme evaluations. This was extended to all UNFPA evaluations in 2014. The system provides information on the status of evaluation recommendations, follow-up actions, and roles/responsibilities for implementation of actions for accepted (or partially accepted) recommendations. In 2013, the system was linked to the UNFPA

[16] http://www.unfpa.org/admin-resource/newsletters

[17] Inception reports; country case study notes; final evaluation reports; executive summaries; and evaluation briefs.

Evaluation Database, ensuring that all evaluation reports are presented with their respective management response.

35. Data from the system is used to report on management response follow-up as part of reporting against the UNFPA Strategic Plan (2014-2017) "organizational effectiveness and efficiency" indicator, which assesses the "percentage of accepted programme evaluation recommendations for which the actions due in the year have been completed". In 2014, the implementation rate of accepted programme evaluation recommendations (including those pending from previous years) for which follow-up actions are due in the year was 76.49 per cent, which represents an improvement over 2013 (60.96 per cent).[18]

36. At present, UNFPA does not formally make use of detailed information on management response follow-up, unlike its arrangements for addressing follow-up to audit recommendations. It should also be noted that the Management Response Tracking System, based on self-reported data by business units, is not subject to external validation. As a result, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which evaluation results are effectively utilized to support organizational decision-making.

37. Corporate evaluations represent a significant investment of resources at UNFPA; the Evaluation Office recognizes the importance of effective follow-up and use. The UNFPA-UNICEF joint evaluation on the joint programme on female genital mutilation provides an example of good practice in promoting effective evaluation use from the outset of the evaluation process. The evaluation offices at UNFPA and UNICEF carefully managed the involvement of key stakeholders in the evaluation process to ensure the effective uptake of the evaluation results and recommendations by decision makers. The senior management of UNFPA and UNICEF prepared a well-coordinated, timely and comprehensive joint management response. The evaluation results were taken into consideration on the design of the second phase of the joint programme and used to improve country-level planning.

E. Financial resources

38. In 2014, the budget allocated to the evaluation function was $3,689,713, representing an overall increase of 20 per cent from 2013. This is primarily related to an increase in the Evaluation Office costs with the establishment of the Director post.

39. The budget on evaluation, as a proportion of UNFPA expenditure, is 0.37 per cent, well below the budget norm of up to 3 per cent of the total programme budget for the evaluation function, as stated in the revised evaluation policy.[19] This indicates that it is not possible to report with precision the full budget and expenditure for UNFPA evaluation outside the Evaluation Office. Financial reporting systems do not capture evaluation expenditure, and there is a particular challenge in assessing staffing costs allocated to evaluation, since these are combined with other functions, such as monitoring.

40. In 2014, the total budget for the country programme evaluations commissioned in 2014 was $1.1 million. The median value was $63,000, representing an improvement of over $50,000 in 2012-2013; however, this still falls short of the recommended $70,000. Funding ranged from $30,000 (Panama) to $139,947 (Zimbabwe); as a proportion of country programme budgets, evaluation budgets ranged from 0.26 per cent (Burkina Faso and Cambodia) to 1.10 per cent (Swaziland).[20]

[18] See annex V for management response follow-up.
[19] DP/FPA/2013/5 (paragraph 32).
[20] See annex II, table B.

41. The Evaluation Office budget of $2,382,084 was entirely funded from the institutional budget. The utilization rate was 96.2 per cent. Only 32.6 per cent of the Evaluation Office budget was available for operational costs (including evaluations). This is not optimal; it will be important to avoid possible funding gaps in the face of rising demand, by diversifying sources of funding for corporate evaluations, in particular ensuring that non-core funded programmes allocate adequate resources to evaluation.

42. The Evaluation Office budget for 2015 is $2,595,131 — reflecting an increase for operational costs to 44.5 per cent. The budgets for the evaluations of the Global Programme to Enhance Reproductive Health Commodity Security and of the H4+ partnership are yet to be finalized, subject to detailed scoping;[21] they will be financed mainly from non-core resources.

43. Looking ahead, it is important for UNFPA to reflect on how to move towards the budget norm of 3 per cent set out in the revised evaluation policy. The new budgeted evaluation plan presents an opportunity to determine the level of evaluation coverage across the organization that is appropriate and necessary to better align with the UNFPA Strategic Plan and business model; and to specify funding modalities to meet growing demands on the evaluation function at all levels.

Table 2
Financial trends for evaluation in UNFPA (2013-2014)

		Budget allocation in millions of $	
		2013	*2014*
Evaluation Office	Staffing costs		1.60
	Operational costs (incl. evaluations)		0.78
	Total Evaluation Office	**1.80**	**2.38**
Decentralized [1]	Staffing costs	-	-
	Operational costs (incl. evaluations)	1.29	1.31
	Total decentralized	**1.29** [2]	**1.31** [3]
Total budget		3.09	3.69
Total UNFPA expenditure		913.2	995.6 [4]
Evaluation budget as share of UNFPA expenditure		**0.34%**	**0.37%**

(1) This figure includes budgets corresponding to country programme evaluations only. At this stage, it is not possible to capture the budgets for other evaluation activities and the cost associated with human resources dedicated to evaluation in decentralized units.
(2) In 2013, the figure corresponds to 27 evaluations (referred to the Evaluation Office for quality assurance, regardless of the year of evaluation).
(3) In 2014, the figure corresponds to the reported budgets for 17 programme-level evaluations commissioned in 2014.
(4) Provisional figure as of 26 March 2015
Source: UNFPA Evaluation Office, UNFPA Annual Report

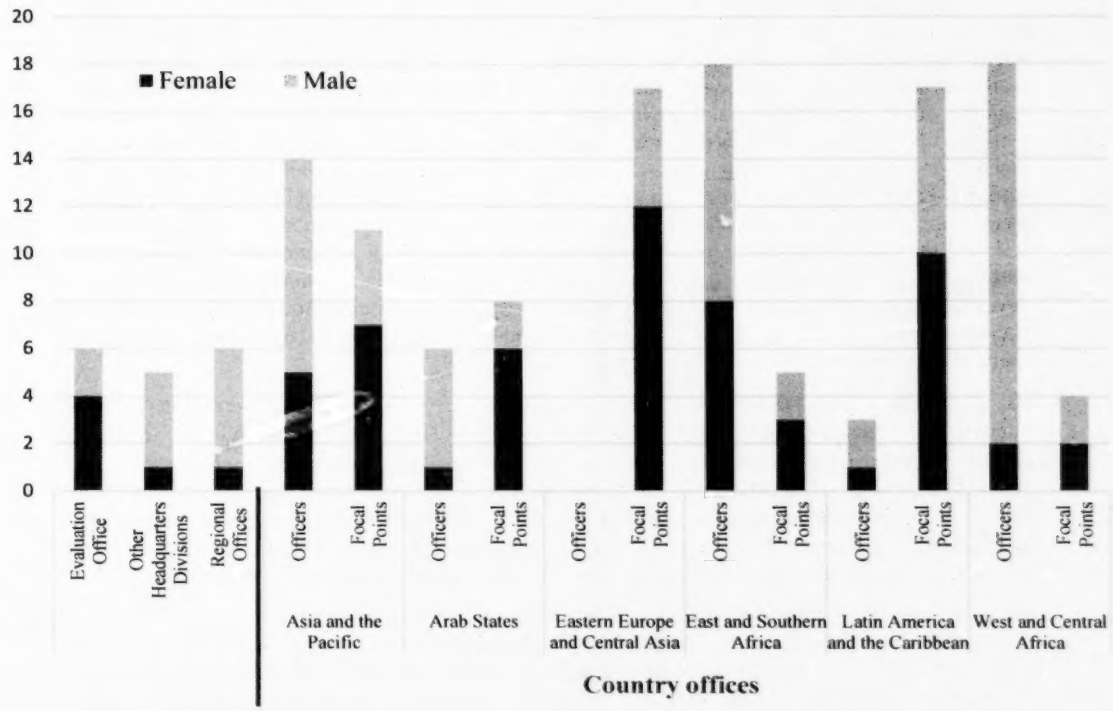
[21] For further details on these evaluations, see annex 1.

F. Human resources

44. Annex VI indicates some positive changes related to the human resources allocated to monitoring and evaluation at UNFPA. The staff ratio, in terms of percentage of professional monitoring and evaluation staff to overall staff, increased to 3 per cent in 2014.

45. There has been a significant increase (28.3 percent) in the number of monitoring and evaluation officers in country offices, with a corresponding decline in the number of focal points. This is a positive trend; almost half of UNFPA country offices are now staffed with a dedicated monitoring and evaluation officer. Figure 1 shows that there are considerable variations across regions.

Figure 1
Number of monitoring and evaluation staff at UNFPA in 2014



Source: UNFPA Evaluation Office

46. On the other hand, staffing levels in the Evaluation Office and regional offices have remained unchanged, despite the increasing workload stemming from the revised evaluation policy, and in particular the request by the Executive Board to strengthen the decentralized function. The Evaluation Office and regional offices are looking at options to strengthen capacity in the short term, through the use of junior professional officers and strategic secondments. UNFPA needs to ensure that staffing and structures at both central and decentralized levels are able to respond flexibly as the evaluation function evolves.

III. Strengthening evaluation capacity

47. In 2014, a range of activities were undertaken to contribute to strengthening the capacity and professionalization of the evaluation function. These complement and build upon the range of initiatives, including methodological guidance and training, which have been progressively introduced since 2012.

48. The Evaluation Office allocated regional focal points to improve coordination and harmonization of evaluation practice across UNFPA. Focal points provide backstopping and *ad hoc* advice to regional offices in their role supporting the needs of country offices. Quarterly meetings are held between the Evaluation Office and regional monitoring and evaluation advisers to assess progress against the transitional budgeted biennial evaluation plan 2014-2015 and identify areas for improvement. The Evaluation Office also played an active role in the recruitment and induction of regional monitoring and evaluation advisers in 2014.[22]

49. Three regional capacity development workshops, with a total of 89 participants, were provided in 2014. A four-day training was provided to 23 staff in the preparation, management, and quality assurance of country programme evaluations in Latin America and the Caribbean. A similar workshop was planned for the Arab States region, but has been postponed to 2015. The Arab States regional office organized a training workshop on results-based monitoring; it include a session facilitated by the Evaluation Office, which led to the establishment of an informal community of practice on evaluation to promote regular knowledge-sharing to support monitoring and evaluation staff of all country offices in the region. In East and Southern Africa, the regional office organized a week-long workshop on results monitoring and evaluation (with support from the Evaluation Office and the Programme Division). One outcome was the launch of a regional monitoring and evaluation network to provide real-time peer-to-peer support for programme evaluations. Other capacity development activities targeted at country offices included the participation of UNFPA monitoring and evaluation officers at the International Program for Development Evaluation Training in Canada, with support from Swiss Development Cooperation.

50. In June 2014, the Executive Board encouraged UNFPA to further strengthen capacity building and professionalization of the monitoring and evaluation functions in UNFPA.[23] Building on the progress made to date, the Evaluation Office has identified further mechanisms to be developed in 2015 including: an easily accessible roster of evaluators vetted by the Evaluation Office; a comprehensive resource platform on UNFPA intranet; development of comprehensive updated guidance to support the planning, management and use of UNFPA evaluations; and strengthened quality assurance mechanisms for both corporate and programme evaluations.

51. At the same time, there is a need to address challenges relating to human resource management and the professionalization of monitoring and evaluation staff. The engagement of the Evaluation Office in the UNEG working group on professionalization and consultation with the Division for Human Resources indicate a range of potential options and highlight the need to develop a comprehensive and adequately resourced capacity development strategy. The Evaluation Office is currently seeking two additional positions (a seconded professional from the Swedish Government, and a junior programme officer) to augment its own capacity over the next two years to advance efforts in this area.

52. UNFPA notes the importance of General Assembly resolution A/RES/67/226 which emphasizes the necessity to intensify efforts to assist programme countries to strengthen national evaluation capacities. Since 2010, the Eastern Europe and Central Asia regional office has been

[22] In 2014, the Evaluation Office participated in the selection of candidates, prepared written tests and took part in panel interviews for the recruitment of the monitoring and evaluation advisers in the regional offices of Latin America and Caribbean; Asia and the Pacific; and Western and Central Africa.

[23] Executive Board decision 2014/17.

particularly proactive in this area, sponsoring the participation of 34 senior officials from 16 countries in the private-public partnership programme developed with the International Program for Development Evaluation Training and Carleton University in Canada. These included participants from government ministries, departments and research institutions responsible for national policy or programme development, aid coordination, national planning, monitoring and evaluation, as well as European Union integration).

53. In 2015, the Evaluation Office and UNFPA regional offices are committed to increasing awareness, through active engagement in global and regional initiatives, of the potential role of UNFPA in strengthening national evaluation capacities related to its mandate area. In 2014, the Evaluation Office became a member of EvalPartners, which works to contribute to improved country-led evaluation systems and policies that are equity-focused and gender responsive.[24] Networking activities by regional offices included (a) contribution to the development of the Interagency Regional Evaluation Network for Arab States; (b) engagement by the Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office with the European Evaluation Society to establish an institutional linkage; and (c) exploration by East and Southern Africa Regional Office of a regional initiative to support capacity building and knowledge management in evaluation. The 2015 Year of Evaluation presents opportunities for UNFPA to develop stronger links with evaluation communities of practice at country, regional and global levels.[25]

IV. Lessons learned from corporate evaluations in 2014

A. Joint Evaluation of joint programmes on gender equality in the United Nations System

54. The Evaluation Office jointly managed (with UN-Women, UNICEF, UNDP, the Millennium Development Goal Fund and the Governments of Spain and Norway) an evaluation of joint programmes on gender equality in the United Nations system. The evaluation aimed to provide credible and useful evaluative information on the added value and worth of joint gender programmes in the United Nations system. The evaluation provided lessons learned and recommendations to United Nations agencies, host governments and citizens, donors and the United Nations Development Group, to strengthen design and improve implementation of the next generation of joint gender programmes in five key areas: relevance; ownership; accountability; sustainable results; and coherence, synergies and efficiency.

55. The evaluation demonstrated the added value of joint gender programmes as a development cooperation modality in the United Nations system. Despite a steep learning curve, the assessed programmes supported governments in meeting their normative commitments, albeit to varying degrees. Joint gender programmes were found to be instrumental in bringing gender issues into national dialogues and prompting positive policy changes. However, they have not led to increased efficiencies, mainly due to systemic barriers, unclear management arrangements and weak design processes. For United Nations agencies, including UNFPA, the evaluation recommended that joint gender programmes should be based on strategic planning processes and linked to United Nations planning frameworks responding to national priorities, rather than driven by *ad hoc* funding opportunities. Joint programmes should be based on a rigorous design phase, ensuring that robust analysis underpins the theory of change and clarity of the role of all partners and stakeholders in design and implementation. The objectives of joint gender programmes should be realistic and built on a sound understanding of the capability of national operating architectures: grounding accountability within the national context. Finally, the evaluation suggested "Delivering as one"

[24] http://www.mymande.org/evalpartners

[25] http://mymande.org/evalyear/Declaring_2015_as_the_International_Year_of_Evaluation

environments provide a particularly conducive setting for joint gender programmes by building on existing cooperation modalities.

B. Evaluation of the third country programme of cooperation between UNFPA and Lebanon (2010-2014)

56. The evaluation of the third country programme of cooperation between UNFPA and Lebanon (2010-2014) found that the objectives of the programme were well adapted to the needs of the population, and that the country office had been able to respond quickly and flexibly to the Syrian crisis. UNFPA has contributed to an increased availability of reproductive health services, including in humanitarian settings, although there have been challenges that have led to limited results in terms of access to these services by the most vulnerable groups. In the field of population and development, UNFPA has re-focused its support on the strengthening of the national policy framework for ageing populations. UNFPA has been instrumental in documenting the situation of the elderly in Lebanon and in providing standards for an accreditation scheme for elderly institutions. In the field of gender, UNFPA was successful in advancing the technical capacity of national institutions and non-governmental organizations and in raising the awareness on gender-based violence.

57. The evaluation recommended that UNFPA continue to adjust its interventions based on the regular conduct of needs assessments, following a participatory approach. UNFPA should also enhance the level of policy dialogue in the areas covered by the country programme. In the field of reproductive health, UNFPA should define a long-term strategy for the introduction of reproductive health in the education system. In the area of population and development, UNFPA should engage in advocacy efforts to ensure that the financial implications of the accreditation scheme for institutions for the elderly are addressed. In the area of gender, UNFPA should build on its past work on gender-based violence to push the issue forward in the national agenda, to increase impact through the enactment and enforcement of policies and laws.

C. Evaluation of the fifth country programme of cooperation between UNFPA and Turkey (2011-2015)

58. The evaluation of the fifth country programme of cooperation between UNFPA and Turkey (2011-2015) found that the needs of the population had been well taken into account in the design of the country programme, although the prioritization of high-risk and the most vulnerable people was considered insufficient. In the field of reproductive health and rights, UNFPA contributed to an increased availability of reproductive health services, including for Syrian refugees. Positive results were noted particularly in the increased access of seasonal migrant workers to family planning and maternal health services. In the field of population and development, UNFPA contributed to the increased availability of demographic and socioeconomic data, particularly on emerging population issues, such as ageing and urbanization. In the field of gender, UNFPA has contributed to an improved response to gender-based violence, although insufficient emphasis was placed on improving protection services for women.

59. The evaluation recommended that the next UNFPA country programme be more focused on identifying, prioritizing and targeting the most vulnerable, marginalized and high-risk groups. In the field of reproductive health and rights, UNFPA should strengthen its relationship with the Ministry of Health and other partners for more effective reproductive health services, at central and provincial levels, particularly aiming at reducing national disparities and focusing more on youth and marginalized groups. In the field of population and development, UNFPA should continue to improve its advocacy role and its role in data availability and analysis on population and development issues, while focusing especially on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. In

the field of gender, UNFPA should continue to work towards establishing an enabling environment for women and for combating gender-based violence by expanding its partnership base (including the private sector) and developing gender equality indicators at regional and local levels.

D. UNFPA humanitarian response to the Syrian crisis

60. The recent independent country programme evaluations of Lebanon and Turkey provide important insights into the UNFPA humanitarian response to the Syrian crisis. In both cases, the evaluations found that UNFPA had provided a quick and flexible response to the needs of Syrian refugees, particularly the provision of reproductive health services, along with prevention of and response to gender-based violence.

61. However, in the case of Lebanon, the evaluation found that the response was not always fully adapted to expressed needs, and recommended that more attention be paid to the needs of the most vulnerable groups. In the case of Turkey, the evaluation found that due to the continuous increase in refugee numbers and corresponding requirements for advocacy, technical assistance and information, the response to the humanitarian situation could overstretch staff and funding resources. The evaluation recommended that UNFPA develop new strategies, preferably jointly with other United Nations agencies, to raise additional resources.

62. Both evaluations shed light on the complexity of the crisis and highlighted the importance of effective information sharing and lesson learning across UNFPA country offices and within the broader humanitarian response. The Syria Coordinated Accountability and Lessons Learning initiative managed by the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation steering group addresses the need for improved information sharing among United Nations agencies.

V. Evaluation partnerships

A. Joint evaluations

63. The Evaluation Office is gradually developing experience in managing and engaging in joint evaluation studies. The existence of joint programmes generally offers the main opportunity for the conduct of joint evaluations. However, the Evaluation Office is actively seeking to identify other areas where joint work would be beneficial.

64. The joint evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation was led by an evaluation management group bringing together the UNFPA and UNICEF Evaluation Offices to make best use of limited resources and to pool expertise. The collaboration extended beyond the cooperation of the two Evaluation Offices, with the joint programme coordination team actively supporting the evaluation. The regular consultations with the joint evaluation reference group, and with the national reference groups in the four countries selected as case studies, was an effective way to validate the evaluation results throughout the process, ensuring their credibility and enhancing the usefulness of the recommendations.

65. The joint evaluation of joint programmes on gender equality in the United Nations system was conducted in close cooperation with three United Nations agencies (UN-Women, UNICEF and UNDP), the Millennium Development Goal Acceleration Fund and two donor countries (the Governments of Spain and Norway). Led by the UN-Women Evaluation Office, the joint modality was an effective way to gather the necessary financial resources to initiate the evaluation of a cross-cutting theme relevant for all participating entities. It also reduced the burden on programme countries, which would have otherwise been created by the conduct of parallel evaluations.

66. In September 2014, the Evaluation Office joined the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation steering group, which is convened by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Priorities for 2014 included the inter-agency humanitarian evaluations of the typhoon Hayan response in the Philippines (completed); the humanitarian crisis in the Central African Republic (ongoing); the humanitarian crisis in South Sudan (ongoing); and the Syria Coordinated Accountability and Lessons Learning initiative (ongoing).

B. United Nations Evaluation Group

67. The Evaluation Office is an active member of the UNEG, and contributes to all four strategic objectives of the UNEG workplan for 2014-2015. In 2014, the Evaluation Office focused efforts in supporting work of the professionalization and peer review sub-groups under strategic objective 1: Evaluation functions and products of United Nations entities meet the UNEG norms and standards for evaluation. The Evaluation Office also contributed to the review of training materials for an e-learning course on evaluation of humanitarian action. The Office participated as a member of the reference group for the gender systemic review led by UN-Women, and continued its participation in the working group for the revision of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan Evaluation Performance Indicator Technical Note and Scorecard to improve reporting on gender equality in evaluation across the United Nations system.

68. The Evaluation Office is a member of the management group for the preparation of the 2015 UNEG annual general meeting and evaluation practitioners exchange in New York (March 2015).

69. The Director of the Evaluation Office has also provided advisory services upon request to UNDP, the World Health Organization and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on various aspects of evaluation policy development.

C. Engagement with global communities of practice on evaluation

70. The Evaluation Office has been working to strengthen engagement in global communities of practice in evaluation, with a view to improving its own practice in critical areas.

71. The Evaluation Office has established contacts with key actors involved in humanitarian evaluations, including the Active Learning Network on Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action, with a view to informing future evaluation of UNFPA interventions in the field of humanitarian assistance.

72. On gender equality, the Evaluation Office participated in the reference group of a review of evaluation approaches and methods for interventions related to violence against women and girls. The Office led a seminar, "Integrating gender approaches in evaluation: the case of Bolivia Country Programme Evaluation", as part of the workshop on "Integrating gender and human rights approaches in evaluation" hosted by the Spanish Government (June 2014).

VI. Looking forward: challenges and prospects for evaluation at UNFPA

73. This report shows continuing progress by UNFPA in moving towards a more mature and effective evaluation function, as acknowledged in two recent independent reviews conducted by

the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network[26] and the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU).[27]

74. However, both reports point to a number of challenges, which are also raised in this report, notably in the areas of planning and coverage of evaluations; quality of programme-level evaluations; financial and human resources dedicated to evaluation; and the monitoring of use of evaluations results.

75. As custodian of the evaluation function at UNFPA,[28] the Evaluation Office proposes a number of recommendations to address these challenges over the coming years and within the framework of the new budgeted evaluation plan, which will commence in 2016.

Yet none of these challenges will be addressed by quick fixes; the anticipated UNEG peer review in 2016 provides an excellent opportunity to have an external independent assessment of the progress of the evaluation function at UNFPA against the revised evaluation policy as well as good practices in the United Nations system.

[26] Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN), *United Nations Population Fund*, Synthesis report, 2014 (JIU/REP/2014/6).

[27] The JIU report is particularly useful, as it compares UNFPA to the evaluation function of 24 other organizations of the United Nations system.

[28] DP/FPA/2013/5, paragraph 24.

Table 3

Challenges	Recommendations
Planning and coverage of evaluations	
(a) The revised evaluation policy requests that each country programme be evaluated at least once every two programme cycles which, in turn, could lead to a reduce in coverage and a decrease in the amount of evaluative evidence to inform decision-making.	UNFPA should clarify the range of evaluations to be conducted, at both central and decentralized levels, to ensure appropriate coverage to meet organizational accountability and learning needs. Comprehensive guidance is required to inform evaluation planning, management and use at all levels.
(b) The growth in programmes funded on non-core resources brings an increasing demand for programme evaluation. However, there is a lack of clarity on evaluation modalities for these programmes.	
Financial resources and budget allocation	
(a) In 2014, the evaluation share of UNFPA total expenditure is 0.34 per cent; this falls far short of the budget norm of up to 3 per cent of the total programme budget for the evaluation function as set out in the revised evaluation policy.	(a) Financial investment in evaluation should be commensurate with a level of coverage that is appropriate and with the necessary alignment with UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2014-2017 and business model.
(b) Budgets dedicated to decentralized evaluation, including for human resources, are ambiguous and mixed with other functions and interventions (notably, monitoring and planning).	(b) Evaluation expenditure should be monitored for the decentralized evaluation function. Evaluation should be coded as a discrete cost item and reported on a yearly basis.
(c) In a context in which non-core resources increasingly support UNFPA programmes, there is a need to ensure that funds dedicated to evaluation are both predictable and well-managed.	(c) Establish a clear normative framework to guide resource allocation so that programmes funded on non-core resources allocate funds to evaluation as appropriate (predictability). When the programme is subject to a corporate evaluation, the evaluation budget line should be directly managed by the Evaluation Office.
Human resources dedicated to evaluation	
(a) Although efforts have been made to strengthen evaluation capacity at country level, there are substantial difference across country offices, and significant variability in staff capacity.	UNFPA needs to ensure that staffing and structures at both central and decentralized levels are able to respond flexibly as the evaluation function evolves. This should be framed within a comprehensive capacity development strategy for monitoring and evaluation staff.
(b) There is a growing demand on the evaluation function at both central and decentralized levels. The revised evaluation policy has clarified roles and responsibilities across the organization. However, the human resources in regional offices and in the Evaluation Office have not increased proportionately to meet organizational needs.	
Management response tracking system	
(a) At present, UNFPA does not formally make use of detailed information on management response follow-up, unlike its arrangements for follow-up of audit recommendations. The Management Response Tracking System is based on self-reported data by business units and not subject to external validation. As a result, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which evaluation results are effectively utilized to support organizational decision-making.	UNFPA should strengthen the system for evaluation follow-up with reference to good practices in other organizations.